



ETHICS, BOUNDARIES AND CRITICAL LIFE SKILLS

FOR
HELPING PROFESSIONALS
and
CLIENTS

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ACT Assessment Consultation Training



Long term MRA, MAMRC and NARL member Join! 😊

PhD Rehabilitation Counselor Education

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"Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. The best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will say we have done it ourselves." -Lao Tzu

Learning Objectives

1. Define **ethical behavior, boundaries, mindfulness and assertiveness**.
2. Based on the CRCC and ACA codes of conduct, understand the **importance of addressing an ethical obligation to successfully practice appropriate boundaries and remain competent in practice**.
3. Describe the importance and contribution of these concepts to **personal efficacy and self esteem**.
4. **Improve personal and client skill sets** that support well-being such as mindfulness and assertive communication techniques. Identify specific practices used to address dysfunctional behaviors in others and self (such as self talk, healthy imaging, meditation, positive psychology).
5. Practice new behaviors and **improve existing responses to difficult situations**. Explore boundary conflicts scenarios and build personal action agendas as needed.

Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification

Code of Ethics addressed in this presentation

- CRC Ethics Code sections B.1, B.3, and F.1 concern the rehabilitation **counselor's relationship with the client**, including respecting client autonomy in the counseling relationship (B.1), ensuring **competence and providing quality services** (B.3), and **maintaining professional boundaries** with family members and other professionals (F.1). These sections guide counselors in prioritizing the client's well-being and dignity, ensuring they provide appropriate and competent care while maintaining professional distance.

National Association of Social Workers

Code of Ethics addressed in this presentation

- NASW Code of Ethics sections 1.03, 1.06, and 1.07 cover **Informed Consent**, **Conflicts of Interest**, and **Privacy and Confidentiality** respectively. Section 1.03 requires social workers to get informed consent for services, including disclosing the purpose, risks, and limitations of the service, especially with **new technology**. Section 1.06 mandates that social workers must **avoid conflicts of interest and dual relationships** that could harm clients and clarify their roles when providing services to multiple people in a relationship. Section 1.07 requires social workers to respect clients' right to privacy and protect the confidentiality of all information, except in cases where disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm

Why do we need a workshop on ethics, boundaries and support strategies ?

Wellbeing Is Plummeting as Worry and Stress Have Spiked to Unprecedented Levels

Gallup poll 2025 The Global Life Evaluation Index measures *how people rate their current and expected future lives.*

Global Life Evaluation Index

THRIVING	29%
STRUGGLING	60%
SUFFERING	12%

- Many leaders are rightfully concerned about the declining wellbeing and the threat it poses to business productivity and performance.
- **Percentage who are "thriving" has dropped to Great Recession levels**
- Daily significant stress and worry have spiked with unprecedented magnitude
- There is significant anxiety about personal finances as financial situations only worsen
- People indicate their mental health will suffer before their physical or financial health does

76% say they have experienced a great deal or fair amount of disruption

Ethics- Do the right thing

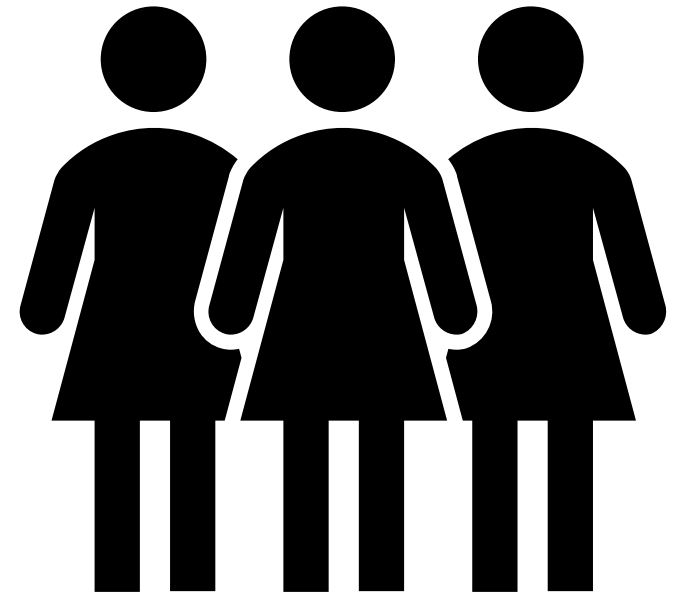
- A system of beliefs that affect behavior
- Professions usually have a code of ethics that support the “right” actions
- A standard of behavior to be met
- Conflict between your personal ethics and job expectations can create conflict and burn out

- Whether this framework gets used in the workplace depends upon a variety of factors including the culture of the workplace, worker familiarity with ethical behavior and choices, supervisory comfort with difficult decision making, time.
- **The important thing to acknowledge here is that often in today's workplaces, we are confronted with policies that do not fit our moral choices. When this happens, it can lead to disenchantment and burn out.**

Starting with Ethics

“Ethical values connect us to a larger world and introduce the ethical question of **what others are entitled to ask from us and what we are entitled to ask from ourselves”**
(Weston, 2008, p. 104).

Ask not what others can do for you...But what you can do for yourself! Michael J. Gargano,
MSEd, LMHC-D, C-DBT



Professional and Ethical Responsibilities

The Counselors' job is to:

- discuss their role and the kind of therapy they provide from the start.
- take reasonable action to reduce and eliminate harm and danger by informing authorities.
- disclose only pertinent and urgent information, especially when safety is a concern.
- prepare clients for termination: providing support, alternatives and follow-up resources.
- monitor situations carefully and review risky situations constantly.
- pay attention to any feelings of uneasiness, doubt, or confusion.
- obtain a professional liability insurance policy.
- be vigilant of the signs of fatigue or burnout, practicing frequent self-care techniques.

What do we mean by boundaries? What professional areas are impacted by boundaries?

a line that marks the limits of an area from the Oxford dictionary

Border, frontier, borderline, partition, dividing line, edge

Ethical behavior requires maintaining healthy boundaries in 3 areas

- **client interactions**
- **organizational dynamics**
- **professional relationships**



Boundaries

- The line between it's OK and It's not OK

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why



What do we mean by boundaries in the therapeutic or counseling domain?

4 Main boundary tasks in the client- counselor relationship. You acknowledge and respect personal boundaries by

1

Establishing
clear
communication
guidelines

2

Managing
physical
contact

3

Avoiding
overlapping
roles with
clients

4

Managing
emotional
involvement

The changing nature of boundaries: cultural impacts

The context of the therapeutic relationship: can you maintain an effective trusting, empathic relationship with strong boundaries?

Use of video technology creates a different environment experienced differently by the user.

Background: Ethics and Boundaries

Boundaries are derived from **ethical treatises, cultural morality, and jurisprudence**, and help to preserve the integrity of relationships and build trust.

Boundary setting can be an ethical issue in many helping professions

Healthcare

- Boundaries protect the health of both the patient and the healthcare professional, and help ensure the focus of the relationship remains on the patient. Crossing boundaries can be unethical and may even be illegal.

Social work

- Boundary issues can arise when social workers face conflicts between their professional duties and their personal relationships. While not all boundary issues are unethical, many can be.

Psychotherapy

- Boundary violations can be harmful and exploitative, and can take advantage of a client's trust and dependence. Examples of boundary violations include engaging in sexual behavior with a client, or sharing personal issues with a client in order to gain emotional support.

Key Differences between ethics and boundaries:

Ethics are generally written rules, while boundaries are often unspoken understandings.

Ethics are broader and apply to all individuals in a profession, while boundaries can be more specific and vary based on the situation and relationship.

Ethics can be enforced through professional bodies or legal frameworks, while boundaries are often maintained through self-awareness and self-regulation.

Scenario: Is this a boundary crossing issue? Why or why not?



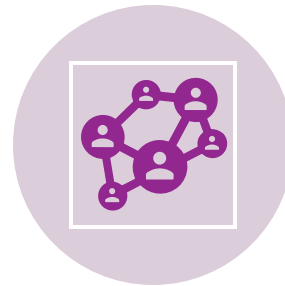
1. Your client asks you to attend his graduation from trade school



2. You and your client attend the same church and are in a study group together that asks you to discuss your beliefs



3. You are uncomfortable with physical touching and your boss hugs you when you share sad news.



4. Your colleague tells you about his extreme dislike of his client, his supervisor...

Engaging in **Appropriate Boundaries** as an Ethical Imperative

Engaging in **Self Care and Wellness** as an Ethical Imperative

APA code of ethics 2.06, parts A.
B.

CRC code of ethics D.3
NASW code of ethics 4.01

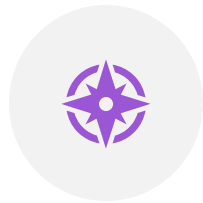
ACA code of ethics C.2.G

.....counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities.

Do you have an obligation to be competent? Are you a professional? Competence is the essence of professionalism and competence is an essential ethical obligation. It provides a critical link between ethics and self-care. As a professional, you accept certain responsibilities and obligations.

Setting and maintaining boundaries

Strategies for setting and maintaining healthy boundaries include:



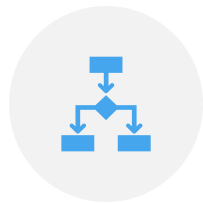
Self-reflection and identifying priorities: **Understand your values,** needs, and limitations to identify which boundaries to set.



Communicating clearly and respectfully: Openly and **honestly communicate** your boundaries and expectations to others.



Setting limits: Define your **working hours, preferred communication channels,** and acceptable behaviors.



Delegating when appropriate: If you are a leader, **delegate tasks** when necessary to maintain a reasonable workload.



Saying "no" when necessary: Declining requests that don't align with your priorities or capabilities is essential for maintaining boundaries and preventing burnout.



Dealing with ethical dilemmas and boundary issues proactively: Familiarize yourself with relevant ethical codes and guidelines, and **seek supervision or support** when encountering difficult situations.



Continuing education and professional development: **Stay informed** about ethical standards and best practices through ongoing learning opportunities.



By embracing ethics and establishing clear boundaries, individuals can foster respectful, responsible, and healthy relationships in their professional and personal lives.

Practicing and maintaining ethical behavior

This takes effort!

Intentionality

Self care strategies

- **Be mindful**
- **Be assertive**
- **Be resilient**

What do we mean by Mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment.
- Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

Benefits of Mindfulness

Increased awareness and valuing of positive and joyful experiences

Development of a sense of interconnectedness with others

Recognition of one's own and other's basic goodness and humanity

Confers psychological, neurological interpersonal benefits

Provides behavior control

A little goes a long way!



Practices: simple, straightforward

- **Pay attention.** Be present. It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience your environment with all of your senses — touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment.** Try to intentionally bring an open, accepting and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself.** Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.
- **Focus on your breathing.** When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.



Mindfulness: Structured for you, for clients

Body scan meditation. Lie on your back with your legs extended and arms at your sides, palms facing up. Focus your attention slowly and deliberately on each part of your body, in order, from toe to head or head to toe. Be aware of any sensations, emotions or thoughts associated with each part of your body.

Sitting meditation. Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap. Breathing through your nose, focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. If physical sensations or thoughts interrupt your meditation, note the experience and then return your focus to your breath.

Walking meditation. Find a quiet place 10 to 20 feet in length, and begin to walk slowly. Focus on the experience of walking, being aware of the sensations of standing and the subtle movements that keep your balance. When you reach the end of your path, turn and continue walking, maintaining awareness of your sensations.

An Exercise for you or for your client

A Calm Place
Adapted from [Mindful
Living Counseling](#),
Orlando, Florida.

- *“Bring to mind a place that you have either been or would like to go to that is very peaceful and very calm. Often, people pick a place in nature ... somewhere that you would either like to go or that you have been that feels settling and calming. When this place is clear in your mind’s eye, fire up your five senses, and in your mind’s eye, look around this place and see the landscape. See the colors, the textures. Notice if the sun is shining or if it is shady, becoming aware of what you would see as you look around.*
- *Next, bring awareness to the sounds you would hear ... the sounds that are close up and the sounds that you would hear at a distance. Take in any scents and smells that are in this calming place.*
- *Next, I’d like you to take a moment and imagine what this place would feel like on your skin. Are you in the sunlight? Or shade? Is it warm, humid? Or is it cool and brisk? Is it windy? So just take a moment to imagine what it would feel like to be in this place.*
- *And now, I’d like you to just take another moment to absorb anything else that feels particularly calming and soothing from this calm place. And we’ll close this practice with three soothing inhales and exhales.”*



Free Mindfulness Apps

- Calm: A very popular app for sleep and relaxation, featuring sleep stories, music, and guided meditations.
- Headspace: Ideal for beginners with its structured approach, it includes guided sessions, courses, and exercises for anxiety, sleep, focus, and more.
- Insight Timer: Considered a great budget option, it provides a large library of over 150,000 free meditations and also has a premium subscription.

What do we mean by Assertiveness?

- Assertiveness is a complex psychological construct, embedded and intricately linked to an individual's beliefs, thoughts, and emotions.



Benefits

- Assertiveness and training programs that increase it are **highly effective at improving mental health** for a variety of populations (Speed et al., 2017).
- Anxiety **Social anxiety**, in particular, has repeatedly been linked to a lack of assertiveness. Assertiveness training has proven beneficial in **reducing and gaining control over anxiety**.
- **Depression** Research has found that increasing assertiveness can **reduce the symptoms of depression**.
- **Serious mental illness** People with severe mental illness often display deficits across cognitive functioning, including social skills such as assertiveness. However, assertiveness training can improve mental health and even chronic conditions such as schizophrenia.
- **Self-esteem** Low self-esteem and reduced self-concept (how someone perceives themselves) are associated with reduced assertiveness. However, when assertiveness training is provided, individuals typically experience **less worry regarding others' opinions and increased confidence in who they are**.
- **Confidence** Assertiveness training is incredibly valuable at all ages for improving self-confidence and has even **reduced the incidence of bullying in school children** (Avşar & Alkaya, 2017).

3 Models of Assertiveness #1

- **1. Mental model: Imagining outcomes**

- A lack of emotional awareness and the mental models we construct combine to impact our degree of assertiveness. Indeed, “how hard people push depends on the consequences they predict” (Ames, 2008). Therefore, before we act, we typically imagine the outcome first.
- If I am highly assertive, I may close the deal.
- If I am low in assertiveness, I may get walked over.
- While forecasting may be accurate, it can also be incorrect, misleading, and lead to mistakes.
- Haven't we all replayed our actions after getting annoyed or frustrated and regretted our response?
- The optimal degree of assertiveness varies depending on the person, the situation, and past experiences. Someone lacking in assertiveness is likely to be pessimistic about the outcome if they consider pushing hard for what they want (Ames et al., 2017).

3 Models of Assertiveness #2

- **2. Model of leader attributes and leader performance**
- Stephen Zaccaro's (2007) leadership model suggests talented leaders result from a balance of traits and attributes that integrate meaningfully rather than increased individual qualities.
- We typically see the most respected leaders as assertive yet not aggressive. They also display stability and consistency across different contexts through a combination of traits linked to both the immediate situation (proximal) and more distant factors (distal; Zaccaro, 2007).

3 Models of Assertiveness #3

- **3. Model of assertiveness for purposeful conservation**
- **Simon Black's (2017)** model of assertiveness comprises four types of responses. Each one appears at different points along the assertiveness scale, grouped under effective or self-defeating behavior:
- Effective behavior
 - Assertive
 - Responsive
- Self-defeating behavior
 - Aggressive
 - Passive
- Being assertive or responsive enables the individual to influence others effectively; this could be as simple as providing information or answering clearly, asking questions, backing up answers with solid reasons, or being persuasive.
- Aggressive and passive behaviors such as sarcasm, being patronizing, putting yourself down, and avoidance are ultimately self-defeating. They damage the individual and the surrounding people.

3 tips to communicate assertively



1

1. Make sure you are genuinely calm and under control before the conversation (wait 24 hours) (draft out your message)



2

2. Say what needs to be said as directly and respectfully as possible. (focus on your part) (don't try to control)



3

3. Use I language

Assertiveness Take aways

- Throughout each day, we experience people seeking different outcomes from our own. Too much or too little assertiveness results in one or both parties not getting what they hope for or need. Instead, through assertiveness – in the absence of aggression – it should be possible to **stand up for our own beliefs** while ensuring a satisfactory outcome for all.
- **Being assertive takes practice.** It is easy to fall into the mistaken behaviors of aggression, passive-aggression, and passivity along the way. In the long term, this behavior is damaging and a risk to our own and others' mental health.
- When habitual, being assertive can **reduce anxiety, diminish the symptoms of depression, and improve self-esteem and self-confidence.** Whether patient or therapist, assertiveness is a valuable skill to have in childhood and adulthood and a wonderful investment of time and energy.

What do we mean by Resilience

When life gives you lemons....
never give up
bounce back
An abundance of hope



Resilience/Coping/

According to Algorani and Gupta (2021, p. 1), coping is described as “thoughts and behaviors mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations.”

Coping is a cognitive and behavioral adaptation that reduces unpleasant emotions such as sadness, fear, and anger regardless of emotional intensity (Stallman, 2020).

Adaptive coping strategies include actions and behaviors such as **active planning and positive reframing** to work through stress, resulting in improved outcomes (Gloria & Steinhardt, 2016). In contrast, maladaptive strategies, such as denial, venting, and substance abuse, often result in undesirable consequences.

An excerpt from the Cat Who Wished to Be a Man

- **“Dr. Tudbelly eyed the distraught Lionel. ‘What are your symptoms? Do you feel baffled? Bewildered? Confused? A little edgy? Frightened? Puzzled?’**
- **‘Yes, yes!’ cried Lionel. ‘All of that!’**
- **‘Good,’ said Dr. Tudbelly. ‘You’re quite normal.’**
- **‘But what shall I do?’**
- **‘Why, the same as any sensible person in the circumstances. Keep going. Hope for the best.’**
- **This advice gave Lionel no comfort, but he could do no more than follow it. Choking back his distress, he plucked up as much heart as he could and started off again.”**
- **(Lloyd Alexander, The Cat Who Wished to Be a Man, p. 67)**



Strategies for building resilience

- **Take action:** Involve yourself in a situation and take action instead of feeling overwhelmed.
- **Foster connections:** Build strong relationships with coworkers, friends, and family for support.
- **Practice self-care:** Take care of yourself physically and mentally through adequate rest, physical activity, and avoiding constant negative news, notes [Mayo Clinic](#) and [UCI Human Resources](#).
- **Find purpose:** Make your days meaningful and understand how you can contribute to your community based on your passions, per UCI Human Resources.
- **Learn from the past:** Reflect on past experiences to learn from them.
- **Stay hopeful:** Maintain a positive outlook for the future.
- **Use your strengths:** Identify and use your strengths every day.
- **Be resourceful:** Find out what others on your team can teach you to get up to speed on a new task, suggests [Indeed UK](#).

PositivePsychology.com's Resources

on how to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-awareness, and manage and overcome times when we lack confidence and assertiveness.

- **My 'Love Letter' to Myself**

With this tool, you can learn to recognize and consider the applications of your great qualities as a means to strengthen self-esteem and resilience.

- **Self-Esteem Journal For Adults**

This worksheet presents a series of journaling prompts that inspire reflection on your best attributes and positive aspects of life.

- **My Personal Beliefs**

Self-acceptance is fundamental to the positive development of our sense of worth, happiness, and life satisfaction. This tool helps you explore your sense of self-appraisals and begin cultivating a more accepting, appreciative, and loving attitude toward yourself.

- **Assertive Communication**

Assertive communication is a prerequisite for sharing thoughts and feelings confidently, getting your point across, and reaching an optimal outcome for both parties.

- **Understanding Self-Confidence**

Teens, adolescents, and adults can benefit from understanding and improving their self-confidence. This valuable exercise encourages you to overcome situations where you lack self-esteem by recalling previous positive memories.

- **17 Positive Communication Exercises**

If you're looking for more science-based ways to help others communicate better, this collection contains 17 validated positive communication tools for practitioners. Use them to help others improve their communication skills and form deeper and more positive relationships.

Self Care Strategies for the Busy Professional

Reframing

Rebranding

Change the way you think about it

Pay attention to the inner dialogue

By re-branding health as well-being, happiness, or quality of life, it is easier to motivate adults to do the right thing when it comes to self-care behaviors

More Self Care Strategies for the Busy Professional

Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes



Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health nutrition expert Dr. Walter Willett observed that, based on these studies, four combined healthy lifestyle factors — **a healthy diet, not smoking, engaging in moderate activity, and avoiding excess weight** — could prevent about 70% to 80% of coronary heart disease and 90% of type 2 diabetes. The catch, he noted, is that only about 4% of people participating in these studies attained all four.

25% Percentage lowered risk of depression among adults who got the recommended amount of physical activity per week—**about 2.5 hours of brisk walking**. Getting more exercise than that does not seem to confer extra mood benefits.

A study published this summer in the Journal Neurology followed over 70,000 health professionals for more than two decades. Those who reported eating **a diet high in colorful fruits and vegetables** had a significantly lower risk of subjective memory loss — which is a sign of dementia — compared with those who did not.

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/long-lasting-healthy-changes-doable-and-worthwhile-202109142594>

Keys to ethical professional behavior

Practical strategies for all of us



MINDFULNESS



ASSERTIVENESS



RESILIENCY

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